(b) *Bangladesh and Myanmar:*

To strengthen bilateral relations with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar, Government have enhanced mutually beneficial linkages in the economic and infrastructural fields, promoted mutual trust and cooperation in areas of common concern and facilitating people-to-people contacts through cultural exchanges, human resources development and travel. Consequently, India's relations with Bangladesh and Myanmar are expanding and diversifying. Recent positive developments include, inter alia, the restoration of the Petrapole- Benapole railway link between India and Bangladesh for carriage of freight, singing of agreements to start a bus service between Agartala and Dhaka as well as a passenger rail service between Sealdah and Jamunabridge East, liberalisation of India-Bangladesh visa regime to facilitate travel of people. With Myanmar, exchange of higl level visits has strengthened political contacts and mutual understandings.

(c) *South East Asian Countries:*

Our 'Look East' policy gave impetus to our widening relationship with countries of South East Asia with whom we have historical, social, cultural and economic ties. Uner the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership, co-operative activities and projects have been taken up with the ASEAN countries in areas of Advanced Materials, Biotechnology, Information Technology, Promotion of Trade and Investment Linkages, human Resources Development, and People to People Interactions. Under the framework of BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand-Economic Cooperation) discussions are being held on cooperation in the areas of Trade and Investment, Technology, Tourism, Culture & Energy, Transport and Communication and Fisheries. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) has recently been launched involving cooperation among India, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand in culture, tourism, Human Resource Development, Communication and infrastructure.

Indo-Australian discussion

3407. SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether during his recent official visit to Australia he had discussions with Government leaders of that country on various strategic issues of a possible common perspective;

(b) whether it is a fact that the US National Missile Defence concept was also discussed with his Australian counterpart; and

(c) if so, the salient points raised and the areas of agreement reached during these discussions?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Both India and Australia welcomed the move by US to attempt a new security framework. Both sides also concurred that the Russians should be duly consulted before amending the ABM Treaty. The two sides further resolved to continue to discuss this matter along with other security-related issues, by setting up a new mechanism, the "India-Australia Strategic Dialogue" at the senior officials level, scheduled to hold its first meeting in August, 2001. The Dialogue will have Civilian and Military participation from both countries.

Indo-Pak Free Trading Agreement

3408. SHRI K.M. SAIFULLAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken up with Pakistan for establishing Free Trading Agreement (FTA) on the lines of India, Sri Lanka (FTA) for greater trade investment flow and strengthening of economic relationship;

(b) if so, Government's response thereto; and

(c) if not, the action proposed in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) In his opening statement at the plenary of the India-Pakistan Summit in Agra on 15th July, 2001 Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee proposed that a group of experts of both countries be constituted to recommend measures to increase bilateral trade, economic and technical interaction between the two countries. Pakistan is yet to respond to this proposal.

Attorney General's Address to UN Sub-Commission

3409. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state: